

THE NEW YORK SEASON - (CONTINUED) 1937

IF all that an American prize competition can produce for one of our finest orchestras is Philip James' *Bret Harte*, we are indeed doing pretty poorly. Perhaps most of our composers disdain these contests or suspect them from past performance, and so no longer enter. In this case—the recent Philharmonic offering—they may have feared the suggestions on the entry blank—offered as recommendations, and not set out as conditions—that the music have some connection (preferably explicit) with the American scene. Their fears were amply justified when the judges, on making their decision, used non-conformity to the suggestion as a reason for disqualifying much music that, I hope, was better than the *Bret Harte* they singled out for honorable mention.

In the program notes Philip James announced his desire to restore to the Barbary Coast values which Hollywood had blemished. In his music, he pays tribute to that same Hollywood with a score characteristic of everything we are accustomed to hear in the more luxurious marble halls of Broadway. The same faked dissonance and tricky syncopation superposed on scores reminiscent of Strauss and Tchaikovsky, and the same brass harmonic filler used by the smaller movie orchestras to achieve the prescribed expensive "glamor," padded out a work that lacked convincing direction or general line. Many of the *tutti* passages, and they were frequent, were confused and unskillful, as was the use of the poor tenor banjo that could have been heard above the din only by the radio audience, because it was placed near a microphone. In Hollywood Max Steiner and Alfred Neumann turn out better scores.

After the constant loudness and lack of clarity of Philip James' work, Mr. Barbirolli conducted a peaceful, clear, and small orchestration of some unpublished Schubert dances by Anton von Webern. In these little works, which were very well conceived from the point of view of sonority both for strings and woodwind, Webern made charming use of an antiphonal handling of the two groups. So suave and peaceful were they that some of Schubert's dance-like character was lost which was the only violence Webern did to him.

Another quiet work played by Barbirolli was Anis Fuleihan's *Symphony*. This was at its best in a first movement that suggested Pizzetti and, in its limpid sober impressionism, the Respighi of the *Metamorphoses*. But later it lost interest, either, as in the fourth movement, through banality of theme and harmony or, as throughout, because it lacked constructive interest. Ideas which should have been followed out to attain their effect were abandoned too soon, direction and position in form were lacking, so that endings came unexpectedly. Nevertheless, in the impressionistic manner this work had a quite unusual quality.

Weinberger's monster extravaganza, *Schwanda* (how this could have failed at the Metropolitan is a bit puzzling) has been making the rounds again. I wish Philip James had succeeded with the *Outcasts of Poker Flat* as well as Weinberger did with Smetana's peasants.

Stassevitch disappointed me by substituting Roger Ducasse's *Sarabande* for Bartok's interesting and seldom played *Tanz Suite*, but he pleased me very much by including Clementi's *Symphony in G-major* which Casella completed and partly orchestrated from a defective manuscript. It was an excellent and very worthwhile job for Casella, and I trust that now we shall hear it often.

As if to complement this performance, Koussevitzky played Clementi's *D-Major Symphony*, also revived through the efforts of Casella. The second work, found in a more complete state, needed less revision than the first and consequently Casella's hand was not so much in evidence. The *D-Major* is charming and gay, while the other tends towards the classic and the dignified. Both exhibited very interesting and piquant handling, delightful Italianate melodies, great conciseness and surprising modulations.

Koussevitzky also revived Arthur Foote's modest *Suite in E-major* for string orchestra and Mac Dowell's *Second Piano Concerto*. With the grammar of Brahms but not his feeling, the Foote work showed a pleasant classical clarity and freshness, as well as skill and invention in working out. In taste and in formal interest it was closer to the eighteenth century than MacDowell's frankly romantic *Concerto*. This latter, because of an over-

hanging lassitude, gives the impression of having been dated even when it was written. Limpness is insupportable when a work aims at drama and brilliance. The musical conception, seems to have stimulated MacDowell merely to write a very elaborate piano part, and this is hardly enough.



Milhaud's *Deuxième* and *Troisième Symphonies* from his *Cinq Symphonies* for small orchestra were played by Lange in the Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra series. These works show Milhaud's great ability to employ at that time (1921) experimental and apparently "written" effects in a musical and spirited way. Here, better than in his *Cinquième Quatuor*, he uses a many voiced contrapuntal polytonal texture very effectively. Some times all seven instruments have as many independent melodic parts to play simultaneously. This might easily produce a tiresome feeling of confusion but since these movements are very short, the longest being thirty-six measures, their gaiety and freshness do not pall. I like the two simpler ones: the first movement of the second and the third of the third, which were full of verve and good spirits. The slow movements failed because they seemed to require a richer texture than solo strings could give.

Contrasted to Milhaud's unusual procedures, Honegger's *Pastorale d'été* which preceded Milhaud on Lange's program seemed uninteresting and unoriginal. Honegger tends to fall down in moods of Mahlerian calm and show his most banal side.

It is unfortunate that both of these composers should be known here mainly by minor works. Will we ever hear *Antigone*, or the first movement of Honegger's *Symphonie*, or Milhaud's *Pan et Syrinx*, *Mort d'un tyran*, *Orestie d'Eschyle*, and *Salade*; or has contemporary music lost out completely in the big organizations that could afford to do these works?

Elliot Carter

MORE ONE-MAN SHOWS

“IT takes all sorts of people to make a world,” is a battered old bromide, but if you attended the last four concerts of the Composers' Forum-Laboratory to hear the works of Mrs. Mabel